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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2161  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1295  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 4496  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4531  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 7458  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 5189  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7684  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3024  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 2942  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 2810  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 3196  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 2340  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 2053  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 3001  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0024  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2267  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KRIF](#) [KDEM](#) [SCUL](#) [CASC](#) [IN](#)  
SUBJECT: RAJASTHAN ANTI-CONVERSION BILL SLOW TO PASS,  
CONTROVERSIAL

REF: A. NEW DELHI 1818  
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 1953

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Fulfilling a BJP party platform commitment, the Rajasthan government introduced an anti-conversion bill on March 31 in the state assembly. Rajasthan Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Mohammad Mahir Azad (opposition Congress Party) predicted to us that the bill will likely pass, but not until the "monsoon session" in August. Human rights activists told us that the bill is discriminatory by implying conversions from Hinduism fall under the ordinance, but conversions to Hinduism do not. In connection with this case, South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center Director Ravi Nair commented to us that, while discrimination against minorities should not be tolerated, evangelical groups must be careful not to disparage Hinduism. Chief Minister Raje's lack of public support for the bill leaves open the chance that it may languish in the assembly and die a slow death. We have successfully opposed this type of discriminatory legislation in the past, and will continue to discourage its enactment in Rajasthan. End Summary.

BJP Has the Numbers to Pass Anti-Conversion Law  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The BJP introduced an anti-conversion bill, called The Rajasthan Swatantrya (Freedom) Act of 2006, in the Rajasthan Assembly on March 31. Congress MLA Mohammad Mahir Azad told us it is unlikely to pass this session, because bills take a minimum of ten days to move through the legislative process, and the current session ends April 7. He reported that Congress and Communist MLAs mounted a boisterous opposition to the bill, terming this resistance "a good sign." However, he indicated that the BJP, which holds almost two-thirds of the seats in the State Assembly, can virtually guarantee the bill receives the necessary simple

majority needed to pass, if its leadership so decides. Rajasthan journalist and political pundit Ram Shastri reported that the Assembly did not discuss the bill on April 3, and contended that it will not move during current session of the State Assembly.

#### The Devil is in the Bill's Details

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¶3. (U) The draft bill prohibits "conversion from one religion to another by the use of force, allurement, or by fraudulent means." SAHRDC Director Ravi Nair noted that the bill is discriminatory due to the way a conversion is defined. The bill states a conversion as "renouncing ones own religion and adopting another," but also notes that "ones own religion" equates to the religion of one's "forefathers." Our interlocutors noted that this clause treats conversions to Hinduism -- believed to be the historical religion of most Indians -- as "coming back into the fold" and therefore outside of the scope of the legislation.

¶4. (U) The bill defines allurement as "offering any temptation in the form of (a) any gift or gratification, either in case or kind, or (b) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise." Under this wide definition, any assistance provided by a religious group to a person outside their faith could be deemed to be against the law. The bill stipulates a minimum of two years in prison and allows for a fine of up to 50 thousand Rupees (USD 1100) for breaking the statute. Under the law, the offense would be "non-bailable," allowing authorities to hold suspects in

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pretrial detention.

#### Opposition to the Law Builds

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¶5. (SBU) Rajya Sabha Member Raashid Alvi (Congress Party) predicted that while Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundara Raje has not been pushing the legislation, without a large-scale public outcry, the bill will likely become law. Explaining the limited influence of the central government over state issues, he commented that there is little the National Congress Party can do to influence the Rajasthan vote. He noted that he would discuss the issue with Congress Party Chairman Sonia Gandhi during the week of April 3-7 with hope of creating a strategy to oppose the bill. Alvi suggested to us that upcoming US congressional delegations should discuss the matter with BJP leaders, including Chief Minister Raje. "A display of US displeasure over the anti-conversion bill will have a greater impact than a similar act by a member the Congress Party," Alvi asserted.

¶6. (SBU) Bishop of Jaipur O. Lewis reported to us that his organization had submitted a memorandum to the Government of Rajasthan complaining of attacks on Christian institutions and the discriminatory law. The Deccan Herald reported on March 25 that the BJP responded the law was drafted to "maintain law and order and to strengthen social harmony."

¶7. (SBU) SAHRDC Director Nair argued to us that the bill "runs contrary to the freedom of religion enshrined in the Indian Constitution and in international conventions that India is a party to. There is grave risk that it will be used to clamp down on minorities and minority institutions." Highlighting the recent case against Emmanuel Ministries International (EMI) (Ref A and B), he asserted that "Rajasthan has been a staging ground for Hindu fundamentalist intimidation and harassment of minority communities" and that "police action against EMI -- the arrest of its employees, the revoking of its license and freezing of its bank accounts -- appears arbitrary and disproportionate to the alleged offense."

Do Not Stoke the Hindutva Fire

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¶8. (SBU) Nair opined that, while political or physical attacks on minority groups and institutions cannot be condoned, it is also "incumbent upon certain evangelical groups to ensure that their legitimate proselytization efforts do not take the form of degrading or disparaging statements or literature targeting other religions." He remarked that many evangelical Christian groups in India fail to acknowledge this difference. (Note: EMI was accused of promoting a book that disparaged Hindu religious practices as idolatry. End Note.) "Such actions only serve to undermine the genuine efforts of those groups that seek to carry out humanitarian activities or peacefully propagate their faith," Nair concluded.

Comment: Bill is Not a Done Deal  
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¶9. (SBU) Chief Minister Raje's lack of public support for the anti-conversion law and calls for religious tolerance from others in Rajasthan leave open the chance that the bill may languish in the assembly and die a slow death. In Rajasthan, secular, human rights and minority religious

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groups continue to publicize the discriminatory nature of the bill hoping to build a strong opposition. We have been successful in helping to defeat this type of discriminatory legislation in other states in the past and will continue oppose its enactment in Rajasthan -- whose state government is strongly forward on its relationship with the US. The Embassy will send a letter to Chief Minister Raje registering USG concern over the anti-conversion legislation on April 5.

¶10. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>  
MULFORD